

Effectively Communicating the Gospel, Part 1 - Acts 26:1-3 – May 23rd, 2010

- Here in chapter 26 we are about to embark on a most fascinating study as we examine the Apostle Paul's defense before King Agrippa.
- By way of introduction, Paul is still in Caesarea where he's been falsely accused and even unjustly imprisoned for the last two years.
- He's appealed to Caesar and will be sent to Rome, but not before standing before King Agrippa so Festus can get a legitimate charge.

- This is part one of a series titled; "Effectively Communicating the Gospel," as we uncover key components to Paul's defense of the faith.
- The Apostle Paul will not only be an example of how to effectively communicate the Gospel, but how to just effectively communicate.
- I suppose you could say that these are effective communication skills and communication musts in order for us to be effective for Christ.

1. Receive their permission (Verse 1a)

1a Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself."

- v1a Luke tells us that King Agrippa gives Paul permission to speak. Without it, he wouldn't have this grand opportunity to preach Christ.
- I believe it's for this reason that we're given this seemingly nebulous detail here in Luke's record. The Holy Spirit wants us to know this.
- At first glance, Agrippa granting Paul permission to speak would be a firm grasp of the obvious, yet it's written here in our Bibles.
- In other words, if this detail was important enough to include in the text it must be important enough for us to take the time to know why.
- I would suggest it's because we need to understand how critical and vital it is that we first have permission to speak into a person's life.
- Absent the "green light" if you will, we're in for a fight because we in effect spoil the sacred, by giving our pearls to pigs, as it were.

Matthew 7:6 "Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces. NIV

- The question we need to ask ourselves is this; "are they looking for an answer, or are they looking for an argument?"
- Paul knew that Festus and Agrippa were looking for answers because they would have to give an answer to Caesar regarding Paul.
- Suffice it to say that Paul knew he had a captive audience because the Lord had orchestrated and even choreographed all his steps.
- We need to discern and decide if we're wasting our time with those who have neither welcomed us nor given permission to us to speak.

Matthew 10:14 If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town. NIV

2. Show them respect (Verse 1b)

1b ... So Paul motioned with his hand and began his defense:

- v1b After receiving permission to speak for himself, we're told that Paul motions with his hand and then he begins his defense.
- What's interesting about this is that Paul isn't actually going to present his defense as much as he is going to present the Gospel.
- Even more interesting is that he will do this by weaving it into the fabric of how he himself came to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.
- Lord willing we'll study that next week, but be that as it may, I want us to take a moment and look at Paul's motioning of his hand.
- Some believe that Paul was actually saluting King Agrippa in a way that would have shown respect for Agrippa's position of authority.
- This is remarkable given King Agrippa's family history. If there was ever one who was unworthy of such a show of respect, it's Agrippa.

As one commentator wrote; "Paul stands before the man whose great-grandfather had tried to kill Jesus as a baby; his grandfather had John the Baptist beheaded; his father had martyred the first apostle, James. This was a man whose family history made him unlikely to receive Paul warmly!"

- This begs the question of why it is and how it is that Paul would and even could be so respectful to one so unworthy of such respect.
- The Apostle Peter gives us the answer to this question in his first epistle when he writes that we do it for the sake of the Lord not men.

1 Peter 2:13-17 13 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, 14 or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. 15 For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. 16 Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. 17 Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king. NIV

3. Acknowledge the privilege (Verse 2)

2 "King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today as I make my defense against all the accusations of the Jews,

- v2 Paul begins by acknowledging that he's fortunate to be standing before Agrippa as he defends against all the Jews accusations.
- Now, it might stand to reason that Paul could be perceived as being disingenuous in an attempt to persuade Agrippa and win his favor.
- However, when you really understand what's going on here it becomes clear that Paul considers himself fortunate for a different reason.
- It's important to remember that Paul has already made his appeal to Caesar, and it's Festus who's the one on the hot seat here.
- In other words, both Festus and Agrippa don't really have any authority to pronounce judgment on Paul let alone sentence him.
- So it wouldn't make sense that Paul is trying to smooth over Agrippa by saying that he considers it a privilege to be standing before him.
- The reason Paul says this, is because he deems it a privilege and good fortune to be presenting his defense by presenting the Gospel.
- Furthermore, Paul realizes that he has been the privileged recipient of God's calling on his life as a chosen vessel to stand before kings.

Acts 9:15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. NKJV

4. Establish common ground (Verse 3a)

3a and especially so because you are well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies.

- v3a Paul then tells Agrippa he's especially fortunate because Agrippa is well acquainted with Jewish customs and controversies.
- What Paul is doing here, by the Holy Spirit, is nothing shy of brilliant. He's establishing a common ground from which to preach Christ.
- He does this by telling Agrippa they have something in common, namely that of being well versed Jewish culture, traditions and religion.
- Paul is being wise in what he does and says because he knows he's fortunate to have this opportunity and wants to make the most of it.

Colossians 4:5-6 5 Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. 6 Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. NIV

5. Be very patient (Verse 3b)

3b Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently.

- v3a Here, Paul begs King Agrippa to listen to him patiently, because he is keenly aware that this is going to require patience on his part.
- If the truth be known patience is what's required on both the part of the hearer and the part of the preacher when it comes to the gospel.
- It's interesting that in verse 28 Agrippa asks Paul; "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?"
- Paul's response is even more interesting when he says in effect, whether it's a short time or long time, he's patiently praying to that end.

Pastor Lloyd Pulley of Calvary Chapel Old Bridge in New York wrote a great book titled; "Patient Evangelism." In it he says; "When the Spirit leads us, we will not push people – we will not need to. We will sense whether there is an opportunity there or not."